



SCI&D SPIRIT

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CATCH the SPIRIT

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Boston Healthcare System
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

The Spirit of the Games... and the Spirit of a Full Life

In July 2013, Boston Veteran Mike Savicki was selected to receive the "Spirit of the Games" award at the 33rd National Veterans Wheelchair Games, held in Tampa, FL. This coveted national award recognizes the wheelchair participant who most outstandingly exhibits positive qualities fostered by all great athletes: sportsmanship, competitiveness, camaraderie, and compassion.

In 1991, Mike, then age 22, was training to become a Navy pilot when he dove into the waters of Pensacola Beach, Florida, broke his neck, and suffered a C6 spinal cord injury resulting in tetraplegia. He came to the Spinal cord Injury (SCI) Center at VA Boston Healthcare System for 8 months of intense rehabilitation.

Prior to injury, Mike had always been an athlete. When he was injured, under the guidance of his therapists, he turned to sports as a part of his rehabilitation.

"Sports were more fun than staying in bed feeling sorry for myself"

Twenty two years later Mike continues to compete in adaptive sports. He has been to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in every one of those twenty-two years. Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Paralyzed Veterans of America, these Games are the largest annual wheelchair sports competition in the world. Over 500 Veterans from all over the U.S., both novice and experienced, compete in numerous sports.

Using a wheelchair for half of his life has not stopped Mike from living his life to the fullest, and achieving his goals. He earned a BA from Tufts University and an MBA from Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, where he was the second graduate to use a wheelchair. He is a life member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America and a noted life member of the National Eagle Scout Association.

"I like to spend my days discovering the wonder, excitement, marvel and beauty of life"

Mike, indeed, has a full life. He works full time as a freelance writer, with a website and a blog supporting others living with SCI. Mike operates his own company

that provides creative communication services for businesses, individuals and nonprofits. He participates in adaptive sports, spends time with his family, and advocates for persons with SCI.

Congratulations, Mike, on all of your impressive accomplishments. And all the best for many more!



Mike Savicki, 'Spirit of the Games' Award recipient.

What is Value in Healthcare?

What matters most when we talk of value in our system of care is what is of value to each Veteran that we serve. The story above, for example, reflects the value that adaptive sports and programs such as the Wheelchair Games offers to this Veteran and to many others.

There is a difference between cost and value. Value considers both quality and cost. I was reminded about this concept when I was speaking to a Veteran the other day. He had recently undergone a surgical procedure on his paralyzed hand and an intense period of post-operative rehabilitation, here at VA BHS. His surgery was part of a program that we recently began offering to Veterans with tetraplegia who meet certain medical and functional criteria. The procedure allowed him to now bring his thumb and index finger together to pinch objects. This was a small gain in movement that was barely visible on casual glance, but it made a dramatic change in his ability to function independently. It may have been costly, not just in terms of healthcare costs but also in terms of his own efforts over the ensuing weeks and the need to endure several days of post-operative immobilization, but it was certainly good value!



Sunil Sabharwal, MD
Chief SCI/D Services

News from the SCI Clinic at VA Central Western Massachusetts

The VA Spinal Cord Injury Service within New England is a hub and spoke network. The SCI Center at VA Boston HCS is the Hub for the seven SCI/D spoke clinics at VA facilities throughout New England. Each of the spoke sites offers an array of services for the Veteran with a spinal cord injury or disorder.

On the second Thursday of each month from 1-3pm, at the VA Central Western Massachusetts (VA CWMA) in Leeds, you will find Veterans with SCI/D gathered in the Occupational Therapy Room. This group was the inspiration of former SCI Case Manager, Rich McNeil, RN, almost 10 years ago and continues today with SCI Coordinator, Janice Cooper, LICSW. It is open to all Veterans with SCI/D. Participants find the gatherings both fun and informative and one way to increase social interaction. Topics for discussion are often generated by the participants and recently have included traveling with SCI/D, history of military service and SCI/D conditions, and Veterans' benefits.

There are two special events each year that are always well attended: the Holiday Party in December and the Adaptive Kayaking/Cookout in the summer. Ms. Cooper, LICSW, is working with a local non-profit agency, All Out Adventures, to secure grant funding for more adaptive sports opportunities for disabled Veterans in western Massachusetts.

Anyone interested in more information can contact Janice Cooper, LICSW @ 413-584-4040 x2954.



Tracey Walker, RN and Janice Cooper, LICSW serve Veterans at the VA CWMA SCI/D CLINIC

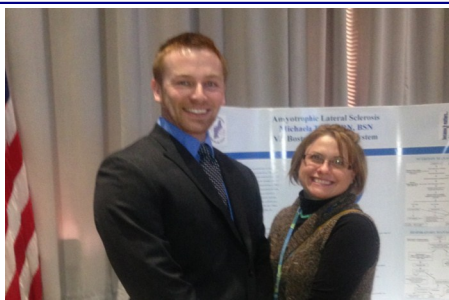


Gary Van Bramer enjoying the VA CWMA SCI Kayaking outing.

SCI Center Hosts 22nd Annual SCI Symposium

Close to 100 health professionals from throughout New England attended the 22nd Annual Spinal Cord Injury Symposium held October 25, 2013 at VA BHS. The annual symposium is offered by the SCI center to educate attendees about the care of patients with Spinal Cord Injury.

The program included presentations from VA BHS staff in medicine, nursing, psychology, vocational rehabilitation, social work, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Topics based on the latest evidence based care included: aging with SCI, surgery for improving hand function, colorectal colon screening, palliative care, ethical issues in SCI practice, rehabilitation for refugees with SCI, employment after SCI, addressing caregiver burden, and activity-based restorative therapy.



Some of the presenters and attendees included, left to right: Denise Dennehy, PT, Amanda Curry, OT, Jeanine Penzo, LICSW, Dan Edelston Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist, Maggie Budd, Neuropsychologist, Beth Tammara, RN, and Nancy Brooks, RN.



Staff Updates

The New England Paralyzed Veterans of America (NEPVA) Banquet was held at the Holiday Inn in Mansfield, MA on Friday, October 4, 2013. Annually, two nursing staff members who work in Spinal Cord Injury at the VA Boston Healthcare System receive the Pierik Award. It is a prestigious award given in recognition of the outstanding care provided to the spinal cord injured veterans. This year's award recipients are Alicia Sullivan, a registered nurse, on the acute SCI unit in West Roxbury, and Jennifer Leonard, a licensed practical nurse, on the long-term care SCI unit in Brockton. They were given silver bowls engraved with: "For Outstanding Care and Devotion to SCI Patients". Louise Milligan who worked on the acute SCI unit in West Roxbury as a health technician recently retired after thirty five years of service. Jennifer, Alicia and Louise were all publicly recognized at this event.



Louise



VA BHS SCI and Medical Center Staff at the NEPVA banquet



Alicia and Jennifer

Healthy Holiday Eating

The holidays can be challenging to make healthy choices. The tendency is to eat and drink more while exercising less. Holiday eating can result in an extra 1-2 pounds every year, which add up over time. Increased weight for a person with SCI can lead to weight gain, difficulty with lifts, transfers and activities of daily living, increased risk for diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and increased pressure on the skin causing skin breakdown. No one wants to be on a strict diet during the holidays. Below are some tips for healthy eating:

- Eat a healthy snack eat a healthy snack, like raw vegetables or fruit before leaving for a party,. You will be less tempted to over indulge.
- Stay more than an arm's length away from the munchies.
- Concentrate on the meal while eating. Eat slowly. Enjoy the smell, taste and texture of each food item.
- Wait 30 minutes before going for seconds. Give your brain time to register that you are full. If still hungry, eat more vegetables and drink water.
- Enjoy your favorite foods in smaller portions.
- Take the focus off food. Socialize. Have fun. Enjoy the time with family and friends. Think about what you are celebrating.
- Limit alcohol. Alcohol adds extra calories and can make you feel hungry leading to overeating.
- Minimize eggnogs and punches that are high in fat, calories and sugar. Try sparkling water or seltzer with a twist of lemon or lime.
- Modify holiday recipes to lower calories, fat and salt.
 - Substitute fruit puree (applesauce, puree prunes, mashed bananas) for fat in baked goods.
 - Roast or grill. Roast sweet potatoes with a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar and spritz of olive oil spray instead of the traditional sweet potato casserole.
 - Use condensed skim milk in drinks and desserts.
 - Reduce sugar in desserts and drinks. Add a bit of citrus, more vanilla, nutmeg or cinnamon.
 - Try a dollop of vanilla fat free yogurt instead of whipped cream on desserts.

Caregiver Corner

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL CAREGIVER MONTH

The SCI Staff at VABHS would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the Caregivers of our Veterans. Without them, many of our Veterans would not be able to remain at home after injury. Our Caregivers provide physical care and emotional support to their loved ones, while managing work schedules and home responsibilities.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU to all of our caregivers!

For more information about caregiver programs, please contact Jeanine Penzo, LICSW (857-203-6498)



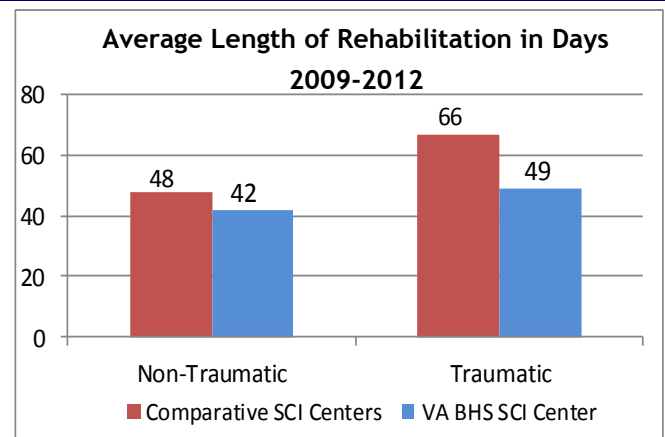
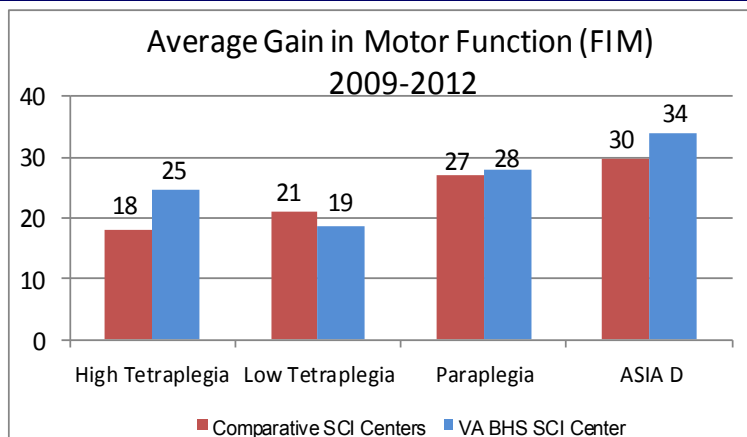
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Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran
1 Veteran Way
Boston, MA 02122

Measuring Effectiveness of SCI Rehabilitation

The amount of improvement in function during rehabilitation is a key measure of effectiveness of SCI rehabilitation programs. The Functional Independence Measure (FIM) is a widely accepted measure of function in people with SCI. We recently received national data showing how we compared in that aspect over a period of 4 years (Fiscal years 2009-2012) with other VA SCI programs of similar size.

While results vary based on the type and level of injury, the data shows that, in general, patients who underwent rehabilitation in the SCI program at VA Boston Healthcare System (VA BHS) achieve equal or greater functional gains compared to the comparison SCI centers (Figure 1). And this higher gain is achieved in a shorter period of time at VA Boston (Figure 2). We are striving to continue to increase the effectiveness of our programs to achieve even better outcomes.



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